



by WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

1922

Little Brown and Company

Continued From Our Last Issue.

Soon they heard a scramble and a splash in the creek. Dan Slike was coming back.

Slike jammed his Winchester into one of the empty scabbards and untied the bridle reins of the horses. Holding the reins in one hand, he gripped a saddle horn and simultaneously stuck toe in stirrup. Ensued then mighty crack of saddle leather, a snort, and Slike found himself on his back on the ground with one foot higher than the head. A gun barrel smote him smartly over the ear.

When Slike emerged into the full possession of his senses, he was the most disgusted man in the territories. "Do you feel like admitting that the district attorney helped you break jail?" asked Billy.

"Nothing to say," declared Dan Slike, the unrepentant.

They found the body of the man with his face in the water. Billy dragged out the body and turned it on its back.

"This feller ain't Jack Murray," cried the perplexed Mr. Wingo. "It's Skinny Shindle. Where's Jack Murray?"

They left Skinny Shindle lying beside the little creek and went to the other dead man beside the branding fire.

Billy turned the dead man face upward. He whistled. "Here's an odd number. This feller is Simon Reelfoot's foreman, Conley. I'd sure like to know why he's riding for the T U."

Came then a punch riding on his occasions.

"I know him," said Dawson. "C'mon, Tommy. It's me, Johnny Dawson."

"Lo, Johnny," Tommy said, with a straight mouth. "But that man with his arms tied kill Daley."

"Is that his name?" asked Billy, flicking his thumb toward the dead man.

"Jim Daley," said Tommy. "Did he?"

"Sure, I killed him," Slike truthfully answered the question.

"Tais is sure hard on Daley," observed Tommy. "He told me he came north for his health."

"North?"

"Yeah, couldn't stand the climate in Arizona, he said," amplified Tommy. "He only joined the outfit last week. Let's go see if I know the other feller."

"Sure, I know him," declared Tommy, after one look at the dead face. "He's named Brindley—been with the Horseshoe since February."

"Toward dawn next day the horses showed signs of tiring. 'Mine won't last another five miles,' said Johnny Dawson."

They were making camp when Billy stopped to examine a butcher knife taken from Slike. He caught his breath. On the handle of the butcher knife the letters T W were cut deep into the wood.

"How many butcher knives did you take from Walton?" he demanded.

"One," replied Slike.

"Why, hell bells!" exclaimed Billy, "then you didn't kill Reelfoot."

"First I knew he was dead," Slike said thoughtfully. "As a rule, I don't kill my customers."

"She said he only took one knife," Billy told himself stupidly. He lay no nearer the solution of the Tuckleton murder. In the way that Slike had killed Tuckleton was smashed to smithereens by the discovery of the Walton butcher knife in Slike's bootleg. Unless Slike had taken two knives. But Slike had not taken two knives.

Early one morning several days later the sheriff pro tem of Crocker county was roused by rappings on the office door. Shotgun Shillman did not open the front door. He went round the back way with his gun in his hand and, on circling the house, he found at the front door a hatless Dan Slike flat on his back in the dust, tied hand and foot, and with a gag in his mouth.

Late in the day Guerrilla Melody called on Nate Sampson, asked the storekeeper several apparently aimless questions and leafed through the cutlery pages of Nate's hardware catalog. Still later in the day Johnny Dawson rode out of Golden Bar. Only two people besides himself knew that he was bound for the railroad and telegraph line.

CHAPTER XVI.

"There's a lot of this stuff I don't understand," said Guerrilla Melody after Dawson's return. "Why did Conley go south? Conley ain't committed any crime round here that I know of."

"I'm betting he did, allia same," said Billy. "Or else why was he so particular to tell those T U boys he was from Arizona?"

Guerrilla looked bewildered. "What did Conley have against Tip?"

"I don't know," said Billy. "But maybe friend Simon can tell us somethin'."

Simon Reelfoot, riding the range that day, met a strange horseman. Did Simon know where Park Valley was? Simon knew.

"Shucks," said the straysman. "Here's a envelope and a pencil. Make a lit map like, will you?"

"Here," said Simon, holding out the envelope. "This ought to fix you up."

To his horror, the well-known voice of Billy Wingo at this back concurred. "It ought to," said Billy Wingo. "Kindly clasp your hands over your hat."

"You oughtn't to have given him that envelope," Billy admonished the straysman. "It has the confession in it."

Simon stirred uneasily on his saddle. Confession! Whose confession? He recalled that there had been several folded sheets of paper in the envelope. Of course, Simon could not know that these sheets were white—innocent of either handwriting or printing.

Billy took the envelope and unfolded the sheets. It was apparent to Reelfoot that he was refreshing his memory.

"Simon," Billy said, glancing up suddenly, "why did Conley go south?"

"I—I dunno!"

"Yes, you do," Billy insisted, striking the sheets of paper with his fist. "We found Conley. He was

and knownin' who killed Tuckleton."

"Certainly doesn't help us any with the stage hold-up," cut in Billy. "Before we solving the riddle in the Tuckleton deal, I've got to do a P.I. more work on the hold-up."

A convivial voice in the street broke into boisterous song. "Who's that?" asked Billy.

"It's Jerry Fern," said Guerrilla indifferently. "He's drunk again. Aunt died, left him money. Big legacy. Must have been for Crafty to lend him money to play with."

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

There was cream and butter in the gambler's voice, but there was grisly menace in his red eyes.

"Gone—gummin' up more than you guys gave him before."

"Wuh-want num-money now?"

"I'll run you in jail!"

"I'll run you in jail!"